

TRAINING SEEING EYE DOGS

Dickson Hartwell

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Training Seeing Eye Dogs

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Condensed from a chapter of *Dogs Against Darkness**

Dickson Hartwell

ONE of the first questions a person usually asks about The Seeing Eye is how the dogs are trained. The first step in educating a dog for this work is selecting the right dog. The dog must be responsive to instruction, a general quality for which The Seeing Eye uses a tongue-twister of a word—"educability."

But there are a good many dogs which readily assimilate lessons that would be highly unsatisfactory in guiding the blind. They are intelligent but lack essential qualities. These qualities are most generally found in the German shepherd.

A notable example of canine intelligence that has no place in guide work is the type possessed by the French poodle, though for many years these dogs have been the stand-by of circus and vaudeville acts.

Poodles are now gaining some distinction and recognition of their intelligence in dog show obedience trials, where a dog is rated according to its ability to execute precisely and efficiently certain standard commands. They are amazingly quick. The French poodle could learn the routine of guiding a blind

person in about two-thirds of the time it takes to teach it to a German shepherd.

But the intelligence of the poodle is such that it obeys the letter of a command with never a thought of disobedience. Obviously this would be a serious handicap in guide work.

Since a blind person cannot see what is before him, he must frequently issue commands to his dog which if followed exactly as given would lead him into disaster. If a blind person were standing on a street corner facing heavy traffic and gave a poodle the command "forward," the reaction of the dog would be to obey instantly.

It would step off into the traffic, possibly at great risk to its own and its master's life. Faced with an open manhole, the poodle on the command "forward" would not go left or right and around the manhole but it would, as has been demonstrated in tests, attempt to jump it, to the imminent and serious risk of its blind charge.

If there were an obstruction across the sidewalk and a line of cars blocking the curb, making it difficult to go around the obstruction, at the command "forward," the poodle would be distressed and unable to proceed. It would be unable to figure out the necessity for

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going first in several other directions in order eventually to go forward.

It does not have the kind of mentality it takes to disobey the letter of such a command, and take the blind man where he wants to go by obeying the spirit of the command.

The dachshund provides an example of a real intelligence in the other extreme. Apart from its size, the dachshund as a type is unsatisfactory for guiding blind people because, being completely self-centered, it uses its intelligence to avoid doing the things it doesn't want to do, if it can at the same time avoid punishment.

This quality in the breed has proved exasperating to many dachshund owners and fanciers, some of whom have condemned the animal. The breed is not dull-witted. It is merely exceedingly clever in gaining its own ends.

The Seeing Eye dog must not only be able to assimilate education; it must be willing to use what it has been taught in a way which will not endanger its blind master. The dog must be able to reason, and by reasoning, not by instinct, determine when a course of procedure would be dangerous to follow. Then it must be able to reason out what can be done which would be safe.

This essential quality is present in some breeds other than shepherds but in those of the right size, strength and with a coat of fur which is easily kept clean, it occurs only in exceptional individuals.

These individuals of other breeds make up about 5 percent of the total graduated by The Seeing Eye. They do the work every bit as well as the shepherd.

The Seeing Eye has been successful with a number of selected animals from a hunting type of dog—namely the Chesapeake and the Labrador Retriever. In hunting, a good retriever reacts only on command, whether that command be the spoken word of a master, the shooting of a gun, or the falling of a bird.

The dog is not expected to take the initiative in figuring out when to retrieve, and indeed, if it does take that initiative, it is an unsatisfactory hunter. If it has the quality of initiative, which is another way of saying the ability to disobey, then it very likely would make a suitable Seeing Eye dog.

The education of a dog covers a period of three months and is divided into three sections or phases. These are obedience exercises, guidance work, and the all-important "educated disobedience."

During the first phase, the special instructor in this field gives the dog a series of exercises, which every dog should have at the end of its puppyhood. They are primarily designed to give the dog an understanding of its relationship to a human being and to teach it something of what are its rights and what are the rights of its master.

In these obedience exercises, there are several specific commands to which the dog is taught to respond

learns to run immediately to the side of the instructor when its name is called together with the word "come." It learns to sit, to lie down and to stand up again, on request, and to fetch an article which has been dropped or tossed a distance away.

Prompt response to these commands will be essential in its later relationship to its blind master. It will also be important throughout its schooling at The Seeing Eye, for these commands are used as daily routine setting-up exercises which serve to sharpen the dog's interest in the more complicated lessons that follow.

Almost all the dogs which start the course pass this period of instruction. The few which are flunked out are sold. Those which succeed are ready for more advanced lessons.

After obedience training the dog studies the technique of working in guiding harness. The dog quickly becomes accustomed to the feel of the guiding harness on its body and the harness is designed so that it does not hamper its movements in any way.

The first lessons teach the animal where it should walk in relation to the man it is guiding—on the left side with somewhat more than half the body of the dog ahead of the instructor.

From this point on the instructor must act to the dog as if he were blind. Anything which would impede the progress of a blind person must also interfere with the prog-

ress of the instructor. If a scaffolding would bump the head of a person who couldn't see, it must also bump his head. Or, as usually happens, he must make the dog think it does.

Where a blind person would run into a tree or into a pedestrian, the instructor does also. A dog must learn by experience to allow sufficient clearance for the man on his side so that he doesn't touch anything.

Every day Seeing Eye dogs guide their blind masters through the heavy pedestrian traffic of Chicago's Michigan Boulevard, San Francisco's Market Street, Philadelphia's Chestnut Street and New York's Fifth Avenue without bumping them into anyone.

Probably the most difficult lesson for the dog in the whole course is one which people rarely appreciate. This is learning to stop at curbs.

This is a difficult lesson for the dog in comparison with stopping for an automobile, for example, because it isn't natural for a dog to stop for a curb, while the penalty for failure to stop for an automobile is manifest.

Curbs are a matter of vital concern in the life of a Seeing Eye dog. First and foremost, every blind man using a Seeing Eye dog gets his primary points of orientation at street corners.

When it comes to the end of a block, the dog guides its master straight to the curb directly ahead and stops. The blind man then

gives the command for the direction in which he wishes to go: right, left or forward, and the dog proceeds to the curb at the next corner and so forth.

One of the problems which is sometimes found in America, is rounded curbs where there are no sharply defined corners. They create a particular difficulty for the dog which must determine in which direction to face before coming to a stop.

Any failure to go straight ahead until the curb is reached, whatever its rounded condition, would be almost certain to confuse the dog's sightless master and probably result in his becoming temporarily lost.

The education of suitable instructors has been the organization's knottiest problem. It is still unsolved. The extent of it is clearly shown by the fact that in its first twelve years The Seeing Eye was able to produce only six men who could be termed instructors and several of these had not completed their courses. Some of them may never become full instructors capable of teaching the dog and the blind man the entire course without need of supervision.

Those candidates for apprenticeship who satisfy the school's initial requirements spend their first several months of training as kennel assistants.

Under supervision they feed the dogs and clean them and turn them out into the exercise runs. This gives them an opportunity to ob-

serve the dogs and to learn how two dogs, which, to the untutored eye seem to be enough alike to be twins, can be absolutely different in temperament, attitude and even in looks. They learn to distinguish the various types of dog and to recognize the factors which influence the growth of individuality.

This close association with a large number of animals provides highly important groundwork without the risk, always present when an amateur attempts to do actual training of ruining one or more dogs in the process. An inept teacher will quickly spoil a dog for use as a Seeing Eye guide simply by confusing the animal through the maladministration of its lessons.

After a period in the kennels, the apprentices go on to primary work in obedience training. They take the course in voice culture through which they learn the proper inflection to use in addressing the dogs and the hand and body movements which supplement the spoken commands in the early stages of training.

When they have learned how to command, dogs are provided for them to work with. Some of these animals may have had previous instruction but others will be completely green.

From time to time the apprentices will get a dog which is mentally incapable of learning even the simplest exercises. They must be able to observe faults in a dog such as this as clearly as they recognize the capabilities in an alert and responsive animal.

The next stage in the education of an instructor is guiding work. As an introduction, the apprentice must devote a period of one month to being "blind." Day and night he wears a lightproof sleepshade while going through precisely the same Seeing Eye course of instruction in learning to use a guide dog which would be given to him if he had suddenly lost his sight.

At the end of this month's course, he has some appreciation of the problems involved in blindness. He knows what it is like to dress and eat and shave in the dark and to go around with and without a dog.

He gains an understanding of the reactions which a person who cannot see will have to lessons given by a seeing instructor. He has had it fully brought home to him that one doesn't tell a blind person in which direction to go by pointing, nor does one describe visually some landmark by which a blind person is expected to identify his location.

The apprentice gains an appreciation of the fact that while there is only a slight difference in the methods used to instruct a person who is blind from the technique used to teach people with eyes, it is a difference of primary importance.



Alcohol Shortage May Solve Prohibition Problem

THE prohibition controversy may shortly be solved by an acute shortage of alcohol. In fact, the government may even have to convert existing stocks of whisky into industrial alcohol for war purposes, according to a summary of legislative trends by Dr. Eugene V. Rostow, Yale law professor, writing in a recent issue of the *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol*.

"The production of whisky and gin has been completely stopped," says Dr. Rostow. "At present all 190 proof alcohol is used for industrial purposes, and the utilization of lower proof capacity is proceeding as rapidly as possible. Yet a shortage, or near shortage, persists."

Dr. Rostow foresees increasing pressure placed on the government to produce synthetic rubber from alcohol as well as from petroleum. If present experiments prove successful, he says, the

shortage of alcohol for beverages will become acute.

Furthermore, the WPB has expressed strong interest in the possibilities of re-converting present stocks of liquor (thought to cover several years' normal consumption) into industrial alcohol, as the Germans are reported to have converted a large part of the contents of French cellars.

"The process is apparently altogether feasible," says Dr. Rostow, "and steps in that direction have already been taken."

If this is true, we may be in for another era of moonshiners and bootleggers. Sugar is even harder to get than it was during the last war, but moonshiners can always use fermented fruits, especially raisins, or corn syrup. Or we may see bootleg sugar this time, instead of smuggled whisky.

The Coming Electric Age

Condensed from two chapters of the book *Super-Electricity**

Raymond F. Yates

WE are on the threshold of an era of automatism that will release human beings from the toil of industry at a rate that will seriously embarrass the efforts toward new social readjustments. Call it progress or what we will, it is here for us to cope with—with all its social, and economic implications.

For the first time in the history of man, the human senses can be duplicated by mechanical contrivances.

It is one thing to devise an automatic machine with purely mechanical parts and quite another thing to endow that same machine with almost human attributes, with senses of feeling, hearing, smelling, and seeing. And electronic devices—photo-electric cells, grid-glow tubes, and vacuum-tubes—do just that.

Vacuum-tubes bob up in the most unexpected places. As we stand looking at a grimy, roaring rolling-mill, we find it difficult to realize that it is being controlled—indeed, mastered—by a tiny and fragile glass tube, and that in another factory in the same town the same little tube is busily sorting over wrapped packages on a conveyor belt and eliminating those

that are below a certain standard.

In the steel industry photo-electric cells have been applied not only to rolling-mills, but also to sheet and rod mills. In the sheet mills they function as limit switches on the run-out tables, and in the rod mills we find them operating the cutting machinery at predetermined standards.

No industry has been benefited more by electronic control than chemistry. Investigation shows a perfectly astounding number of applications in this industry. Photo-electric cells, due to their great sensitivity for delicate shades of color, are used in the very precise process of titration, something that would have been considered utterly beyond accomplishment a few years back.

A manufacturer of paper containers sold his butter cartons by the pound, partly because of the great difficulty of finding a reliable mechanical device that would count them. But the cartons were impregnated with wax, and it was practically impossible to control this impregnation to a point where a specified number of cartons would have a specified weight. Yet the purchaser, depending upon finding a certain number of cartons to the package, really ordered by the

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INCHES				INCHES			
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1524	10	"	7 "	1530	12	"	9 1/2 "
1525	9	"	6 "	1532	13	"	10 "
1526	9 1/2	"	7 1/4 "	1533	14	"	11 "
1527	10 1/2	"	7 3/4 "	1534	15	"	12 "
1528	11	"	8 "				

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